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RIVERSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH
2650 Park Street
Jacksonville
Duval County
Florida

HABS No. FL-351

WRITTEN HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HABS
FLA,
16-JACK,
12-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FL-351

RIVERSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH

Location: 2650 Park Street, Jacksonville, Duval County, Florida.

USGS Jacksonville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.433355.3353180.

Present Owner: Trustees of Riverside Church.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Significance: An outstanding example of 1920's Florida Boom Architecture (eclecticism) and the only church ever designed by Addison Mizner, popular Palm Beach architect. The octagonal structure in the Spanish Romanesque revival style is unique in northern Florida. Featuring hand-crafted interior details, singular natural lighting, and sixteenth-century floor tiles imported from Spain, it was considered by contemporaries to have been Mizner's masterpiece. (This building is on the National Register.)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction was begun in July 1924; the cornerstone was laid January 25, 1926; the first regular service was held April 4, 1926 (RBC archives).
2. Architect: Addison Mizner (1872-1933). Mizner is best known for his association with the aristocratic "Palm Beach Crowd" during the Roaring Twenties. A flamboyant character and the member of a flamboyant family, Mizner had a well documented life style. Written works include his own, The Many Mizners, Alva Johnston's The Incredible Mizners, and Albert Johnson's The Legendary Mizners.

Addison Mizner, born in California in 1872, was raised in the San Francisco area until he went to Guatemala while his father was a special envoy of the U.S. Government, concerned with smoothing out diplomatic relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua to accomodate the Canal (Tarbell).

His residence in Latin American, ca. 1885-1890, marked the beginning of his self-styled and highly eclectic architectural training. In Guatemala he was exposed to sixteenth century ruins and things brought from Spain. At the age of eighteen he went to the source and visited Salamanca. He then traveled to Hawaii and Australia while in his early twenties, supporting himself by boxing and drawing. He returned to Europe to "study" architecture by seeing, sketching, and collecting photographs and engravings (Tarbell).

In Spain he visited almost every major example of ecclesiastical architecture paying particular attention to the Gothic. Mizner adored the Gothic; pictures of Burgos and Toledo hung in his Palm Beach living room. Consequently one finds a profusion of Spanish Gothic ornamentation throughout Mizner's domestic architecture (Seiden, p. 30)

According to an article by Steven Seiden, in Palm Beach Life:

Addison relates that his first job was with one Willis Polk, a San Francisco architect. However, one wonders if this Polk was the Willis Jefferson Polk, famous for his "bungalow style" and bank architecture of the early 1900's. Willis Polk's father...was also an architect...Mizner never says whether it was father or son for whom he worked (Seide, p. 30).

Within a few years Mizner traveled again, disappointed by the loss of the commission of the governmental palace and the assassination of his boyhood friend Rapheno Barrios in Guatemala when the political tide turned (Tarbell). He landed on the east coast and:

Worked for the New York firm of McKim Meade, and White in 1905. (The influential Mrs. Herman Oelrichs got friend Addison the job.) No doubt Mizner learned the meaning of the grandiose in architectural space...If nothing else, Mizner learned the meaning of being a society architect... More than likely, Mizner's association with the firm and particularly with Stanford White, gave him much valuable experience in interior decoration as well as in the use of traditional architectural forms (Seiden, p. 30).

Mizner preferred Medieval Spanish motifs to the Italian Renaissance; "as an architectural importer, Mizner does have the distinction of beginning a twentieth century style of Spanish design in the State of Florida which found its way up the eastern seaboard to Long Island and Westchester" (Seiden, p. 30). Soon after the completion of the Everglades Club of 1918 (for Paris Singer in Palm Beach, "Mizner Spanish" became the rage. He "profoundly influenced" the designers Marion Sims Wyeth, Byron Simonson, and John Volk (Seiden, pp. 30-1). Furthermore:

It was not unusual for architects to design Spanish style houses and purchase ornament, tile, furnishings, etc., from Mizner. The "Spanish itch" became a disease in Florida...The need for such measured drawings became so great that William Helburn, New York architectural publisher, printed a great number of volumes containing details of Spanish architecture. Most of these, in fact the vast majority, were published after the Mizner boom began in 1925. Helburn also published a handsome collection of Mizner's Palm Beach architecture. Thus the Mizner influence was spread through the eastern United States...Architects such as M. L. Hampden and Walter DiGarmo adopted all kinds of Mediterranean design to the initial Mizner idea. The style spread to the North Atlantic seaboard during the thirties and there was allied with already existing European styles. Westchester, Long Island, and Connecticut show influences of this (Seiden, p. 32).

Mizner was lambasted by Frank Lloyd Wright and by Turpin C. Bannister in The DAB as being an overly theatrical architectural thief (Seiden, p. 32). But his work in the shopping arcades in Palm Beach and in the residences there and in Boca Raton testify to his skill in bringing color, good scale, superior detailing, and climatically-attuned comfort to the stark landscape of south Florida. Nor should the value of his establishment of The Los Manos (Handmade) Factory in Palm Beach be overlooked. This was begun to glaze the "Mizner Blue" craft tiles, and was expanded into a wood carving and furniture factory to make usable antique copies. Next came an iron forge and a stone casting works (Tarbell).

By the late 1920's, several of his "disciples" started taking commissions away from him. Seiden suggests "the Spanish itch" became distasteful to the elite commissioners when it began appearing in a debased form on gas stations and bungalows (Seiden, p.31). The Depression relegated the ailing Mizner into semi-retirement in 1932. He died soon after on February 8, 1933.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The sanctuary is located in Riverside Annex, on Block 5, lots 5 and 6, as recorded in the Riverside Annex plat book 1, p. 60, of the Title and Trust Co. of Florida, 200 East Forsyth Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

The trustees of the Riverside Baptist Church acquired title to the land by Deed from the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention on April 16, 1916, as recorded in liber 154, folio 730 on December 21, 1916, and have held it ever since.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The original plans are on microfiche at the Building and Zoning Division of City Hall, Bay Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

On the occasion of its dedication, Rev. Lee White of the Church related that the tile in the floor came from a seventeenth century Spanish castle (Florida Times-Union, 4/3/26, 24:1). Later newspaper reports, relying on the testimony of church members relate that the edifice contains "features borrowed from Santa Sophia in Istanbul (the center chandelier), St. Peter's in Rome (the golden lighting in the choir loft), and Napoleon's tomb in L'Hotel des Invalides in Paris "the overall bluish illumination", (Caldwell); "Church members recall that before Mizner drew any plans he spent an entire day sitting in a chair on the building site, watching the play of shadows on the ground which was to receive the sanctuary" (Ibid). Hence the choir is flooded with golden light at approximately 11:00 A.M. Mizner reputedly also had burnt umber rubbed into the exterior walls and buttermilk or condensed milk rubbed into the interior cypress woodwork to achieve an effect of age (Ibid)

Letters from Wilkie Schell, of the original Church Building Committee to insurance and loans agencies provide detailed information about the original construction:

Mr. Mizner gave the stone work to a firm in West Palm Beach, stressing the importance of making us a very low figure. The firm has been doing all of Mr. Mizner's work in Palm Beach...Mr. Mizner drew all the designs for the building; Mr. Kitchell made the blueprints and took care of the engineering features of the building. Mr. Kitchell made the plans from Mr. Mizner's designs; he looked after its construction" (Schell to Caldwell and Co., Nashville, Tennessee. 10/1/-26 and 10/1/26).

In a letter of October 9, 1926, Schell relates to the Caldwell Insurance Company:

The foundation is a spread foundation of brick laid on concrete footings. All corners and bearing parts of all walls are laid up in brick with cement mortar. Field spaces are laid up with Inter-Lochen tile. The floor is entirely concrete. The boiler room has a concrete floor and the roof of the boiler room which forms the floor of the choir is reinforced concrete. The floor of the auditorium, baptistry, rostrum and corridors is covered with imported Spanish tile and the part of the floor of the auditorium occupied by the pews is covered with Battleship linoleum. The floor of the choir space, balcony, and the various rooms at the rear is covered with wooden flooring laid on screeds over the concrete

The roof is Addison Mizner's tile laid over 30 lb. felt. The Octagon is carried by steel trusses, designed specially for it. Across this is laid purlins of solid 4 X 6's and on top of these purlins is laid the 2" Cypress which is exposed underneath. The roof of the naves and transepts [sic] and other portions of the building is carried by wooden trusses, rafters, etc. All roofs are covered with the same tile described above with the exception of the flat part at the rear of the right elevation which is covered with copper.

We ice in the double boiler system and fan-cool the church...The exterior walls are stucco; interior plaster on brick and tile. The millwork is all special, done according to details by Addison Mizner and Bruce Kitchell. All the exterior glass is a grayish blue shade selected by Addison Mizner personally. The wrought iron grilles, floor tiles, and electric light fixtures were selected and bought by the architects.

The decorating of the walls, both interior and exterior, the painting of the woodwork, the finishing of the pews and furniture were all done under the personal supervision of the architects. Mr. Mizner himself selected the colors, watched them put on samples and decided on the final colors, and Mr. Kitchell saw through the completion.

The main ornamentation is of cast ornamental stone which forms all columns, window and door trim, and is used on both exterior and interior. All capitals and ornaments differ in design; no two alike can be seen together and each pattern was cast an molded off plates of old-time masterpieces selected by Mr. Mizner himself. All cornices, etc. were designed by Mr. Kitchell and each piece of stone is a true replica of the plate.

The pews and furniture are all made of American Black Walnut to detail. The organ is a Skinner...(Schell letter 10/9/26).

Another note to Caldwell lists approximate construction costs:

Excavating and preparing ground:	\$ 2,000.00
Brick and tile work:	30,000.00
Concrete work:	4,000.00
Stone work:	36,000.00
Steel (roof trusses):	3,200.00
Heating and roofing:	12,500.00
Oil burning equipment:	1,500.00
Stucco and plastering:	7,500.00
Floor tile:	3,200.00
Plumbing:	3,000.00
Electric wiring:	1,850.00
Electric fixtures:	3,000.00
Rgh. hardware:	800.00
Finish hardware:	2,000.00
Linoleum:	1,200.00
Wrought iron grilles:	3,500.00
Lumber:	2,000.00
Mill and glazing:	10,190.00
Painting and decorstion:	1,000.00
Contractors fee:	6,000.00
Architects fee:	8,500.00
Organ:	16,500.00
Pews:	11,500.00
Furniture:	4,000.00

(Schell letter, 10/9/26). Advertisements in the local newspaper on the day of first regular services indicate that The Putnam Lumber Co., of Milldald, supplied the lumber; E. G. Golder Company, Jacksonville, the heating system; John S. Graham, Jacksonville, the plastering and stucco; Schell-Saase Manufacturing Company, Jacksonville the millwork; and J. C. Halsema Manufacturing Company, Jacksonville, the linoleum (Florida Times-Union, 4/3/26, pp.24-25).

An undated newspaper clipping in the Church archives notes that, "Paris Singer, for whom Mizner created the Everglades Club in Palm Beach, visited the Church several years ago and agreed with the architect that it was his greatest work".

5. Alterations and additions: The only alteration to the sanctuary occurred in 1960 when an air conditioning system was installed. This involved installing a unit above the wooden ceiling below the southwest balcony (facing King Street) and replacing the original wood (Cooper interview).

In December of 1948, the Jacksonville firm of Marsh and Saxelbye were authorized to draw plans for the center-most portion of a \$400,000 education unit adjoining Mizner's design on the southeast (letter from W. W. Dixon, chairman of Building Committee, 12/20/48 in RBC archives).

A three-story educational and meeting unit was begun in 1964 to complete the complex by Harold F. Saxelby of the Jacksonville firm of Saxelbye and Powell, Architects (letter from B. S. Reid, building committee, 3/10/64 in RBC archives).

B Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

History of the Riverside Baptist Church: The Riverside Baptist Church was the first church to locate south of Margaret Street in Riverside (Church History, 4/2/30, RBC archives). The suburb of Riverside began to develop fashionable residences in the 1890's (Brown, p. 139ff) and the southern section of it was very sparsely settled at the time of the establishment of the first church building in 1909. This "cheaply constructed board building" (Ibid) situated on the corner of Park and Margaret Streets. In 1913, the church moved to a temporary building on the site of the present church at the even more remote corner of Park and King Streets (Ibid). By 1924, the growing congregation was in need of a larger facility. Although they had very little money to put to the purpose, Dr. H. Marshall Taylor of Jacksonville agreed to approach Mizner, then at the height of his career, about designing a church (RBC archives).

Mizner was anything but an ecclesiastical architect. However, in 1925 letter to his brother, the Reverend Henry Mizner, Addison stated that he and another brother, Wilson, had decided "that the best thing to do would be to build a Cathedral of the Madonna in memory of Mamma Mizner: by way of trying to leave a real monument to the Mizner tribe" (letter reprint in PBL). Mizner wrote,

I want to build one thing by my own pleasure without any interference from outside influences. My idea is to spend two or three million on the building and collect the very finest religious things abroad for the rest of my life, to

to be placed in the church, and, ultimately, if the Episcopal Church will take it over with the understanding that it will be a semi-museum, well and good, but until my death it will be held by me and if they do not want the church, it can be the Cathedral of Thought, 15, whatever in the Hell you want to call it (Ibid).

The Cathedral never materialized; Mizner may have considered the Riverside project a "dry run". Whatever the motivation, Mizner did not charge the congregation for his personal services in making the design (RBC Chimes, "Historical Background" 3/4/73. RBC archives).

The sanctuary was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places on January 22, 1973.

(A complete history of the church and its ministry is available in the Church library.)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary sources:

(a) Plans: A set of drawings by Addison and Mizner and Bruce Kitchell, associate architects, dated 3/8/1924, are on microfiche in the files of the Building Permit Department, City Hall, Bay Street, Jacksonville. The eleven sheets include Herschel, Park, and King Streets and rear elevations, foundation and main floor plans, balcony and ceiling plan, roof framing, longitudinal, transverse section and section of stair.

(b) Old Views: A number of sketches and photographs of the Sanctuary, ca. 1926, are in the Church archives, in the library, Room 104, Riverside Baptist Church, 2650 Park Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

(c) Manuscripts, letters, etc.: Various unpublished histories of the Church and the Church building and a series of letters from secretaries of the Building Committee to architects and mortgage and insurance underwriters, including several from Wilkie J. Schell of the one original Building Committee are in the Riverside Baptist Church archives in their library, Room 104, 2650 Park Street, Jacksonville, Florida.

(d) Interviews: Dr. C. Earl Cooper, present Pastor of Riverside Baptist Church, 2650 Park Street, Jacksonville, Florida, June 25, 1975, concerning alterations to the sanctuary.

2. Secondary sources:

(a) Newspapers: Anon., "First Services at Riverside Baptist to be Held Easter", Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, April 3, 1926, 24:1.

Anon., "Florida's Churches of Distinction", Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville, January 10, 1954, 57:4.

Caldwell11, Joe., "Baptists Broke Tradition with Poem in Stone", Jacksonville Journal, September 30, 1961, 2:1.

(b) Other: Anon. "Historical Background of the Riverside Baptist Church", The Chimes (weekly Church Bulletin), XIX, no. 9 (March 4, 1973; Riverside Baptist Church, Jacksonville publishers.

Brown, S. Paul. The Book of Jacksonville. Poughkeepsie, New York: A. V. Haight, 1895.

Mizner, Addison. Letter to his brother Henry Mizner dated August 15, 1925, reprinted in Palm Beach Life, LIV (May, 1961, p. 79.

Seiden, Steven Arnold. "The Mizner Touch", Palm Beach Life, LIV (August 24, 1961), pp. 30-33.

Tarbell, Ida M. "Introduction: to The Florida Architecture of Addison Mizner. New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1928.

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Historic American
Buildings Survey
Jacksonville, Florida
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. An example of 1920's Florida boom architecture and the only church ever designed by Addison Mizner, the octagonal Romanesque Revival building features exposed trusses, natural lighting, hand-crafted details.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.
3. Overall dimensions: W 38'+18" stairwell 1/2 x 110'. Number of bays, 3 per side. Number of stories 1. Layout shape: Octagon, imposed on Greek Cross.
4. Foundations: Spread foundation of brick on concrete footings.
5. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick bearing walls, ashlar scored stucco (grey-white).
6. Structural system, framing: Roof: 8 intersecting trusses; exposed purlins, rafters, wooden sheathing, (wooden sheathed steel trusses with painted decoration, 4 x 6 purlins, 2" cypress sheathing).
7. Narthex gable supported by giant pilasters; Romanesque arch over entry.
8. Chimneys: One; campanile form.
9. Openings: Doorways and doors: Narthex: Romanesque arch with multiple extrados and varied archivolt trim; tympanum relief depicting baptism of Jesus. Transept entries (north & south), Romanesque arches, all doors rusticated cypress with Greek cross panels.
10. Cornice, eaves: Machicolated arcaded fascia, arches springing from floral form bracelets. Primary decorative details: floral forms, varied treatment of capitals, grotesques.
11. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Octagonal stair well.
Chancel-transept: campanile form chimney.

12. Floor plans: Octagonal sanctuary with four arms.
(Chancel - northeast arm, narthex - southwest arm, transepts - northwest and southeast arms).
13. Stairways: Northside of narthex: Octagonal stairwell to choir loft over narthex.
14. Flooring: Antique terra cotta square tile aisles, asphalt tile elsewhere.
15. Wall and ceiling finish: Ashlar marked grey plaster walls. Exposed framing of ceiling: Painted ornamentation on trusses.
16. Doorways and doors: Rusticated cypress with Creek cross panels.
17. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Tripart Romanesque arches springing from varied capitals (lotus and other flora forms). Chancel: cinquefoil arches house exposed organ pipes, wrought iron screen, carved octagonal pulpit, spindle and arch-trimmed walnut pews.
18. Notable hardware: Wrought iron screens.
19. Mechanical equipment: Clear leaded glass chandelier (octagonal) suspended from boss at truss intersection and other multifaceted hanging fixtures.

B.

Site and surroundings: The church is located at the east corner of the intersection of Park and King Streets in Riverside, facade oriented to the southwest, 240 degrees.

Historic landscape design: Typical Florida flora.

Outbuildings: Added church educational building joined to original building by loggia.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Florida Bicentennial Commission and the Jacksonville Historical and Cultural Conservation Commission, under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, at the HABS field Office, Riverside, Jacksonville, Florida, by Susan Tate (University of Florida), project supervisor; Frederick Wiedenmann (University of Florida), architect;Carolynn Hamm (Cornell University), project historian; and student assistant architect Robert Moje (University of Virginia).

ADDENDUM TO:
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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